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ON AVIATION SECURITY DURING THE SUMMER TRAVEL SEASON AND
BEYOND

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Congressman DeFazio, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you today to report on the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) plans for maintaining world-class security over the busy summer travel season.

Now well into our second year of Federalized passenger screening at U.S. airports, TSA has successfully shepherded air travelers through several high peak travel seasons—both winter holiday and summer vacation periods. The most recent such period, starting with the Thanksgiving travel period through New Year's, was one during which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had raised the terrorist threat level to Orange. Although large numbers of passengers processed through our screening checkpoints, security was strong and effective, and there were few instances of disruption in the efficiency of the screening process. Feedback from travelers rated TSA's customer service as excellent, particularly with respect to families, seniors, and children. This was also evidenced, among other things, through strong positive feedback from aviation industry stakeholders.

Our goal is to build on the success of these earlier experiences by continuing to provide the best possible security, while working with our aviation industry partners to minimize the inconveniences of air travel that could be frustrating to the traveling public and ultimately damaging to the continued recovery of the aviation industry. To this end, TSA has been working in partnership with our stakeholders, including air carriers and airport operators, as well as the associations that represent these stakeholders. This partnership has been a fruitful one, and the support of our stakeholders is key to ensuring the success of our strategy for dealing with increasing air travel while maintaining the necessary level of security. Together we have designed a plan for developing and instituting best practices that will serve us well, not only during the summer travel season, but also into the future. Our multilevel program for increasing passenger throughput at the airports, generally, and identifying particularly challenging airport environments for additional attention, will be in place in time for the Memorial Day weekend that marks the beginning of high volume summer travel.

TSA's ability to avoid delays during the high summer travel season will be challenged not only by the sheer volume of passengers traveling during the summer and augmented air carrier schedules designed to accommodate the increased travel demand, but by existing checkpoint lane capacity and airport configuration, an increase in the number of items to be screened, and generally, the higher stress levels that the traveling public may experience in these conditions.

TSA has been working with the Air Transport Association (ATA), representing air carriers, and the Airports Council International-North America (ACI-NA) and the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE), representing airport managers and directors, to develop a plan that deals proactively with these and other special challenges that summer travel will pose. The normal increase in air travel occasioned by summer vacation plans is only one dynamic that is being factored into our planning, and we are mindful that the summer period will require us to sustain robust operations over a longer period than during the winter holiday season. Additionally, there are many special events scheduled for the summer months that will require particular attention, not only because they will increase the concentration of travel to particular airports for short periods of time, but because the nature of the events may attract the attention of those who wish to do us harm. Among these are the G-8 Conference in Savannah, Georgia in June, the Democratic National Convention in Boston in July, and the Republican National Convention in New York City in August. The Independence Day travel weekend will also spawn greater security concerns overall, and particularly in specific venues.

With our stakeholder partners, we first identified twenty-five "focus airports" for special attention. These airports may pose particular concerns for a variety of reasons impacting the level of traffic through the airport—size, proximity to special events, or proximity to high-traffic summer vacation destinations. The special attention that these airports are given may include additional staffing in positions that support the screening process, such as exit-lane monitors, queue handlers, or ticket checkers. This additional staffing may come from TSA headquarters staff or administrative staff in the field on a temporary basis, or from the airports or airlines themselves. Also, our National Screening Force (NSF) will be mobilized as necessary to augment screening for events that will generate extraordinary traffic.

Working with the aviation industry, we have developed the Aviation Partnership Support Plan, which includes multiple initiatives to increase throughput at all airports while assuring the same high level of security that the Nation expects:

First, TSA will soon release to FSDs and airport staff a guidebook of "best practices" covering a comprehensive range of techniques to increase throughput at the screening checkpoints. Many of these techniques resulted from the direct input of our stakeholders, and will serve to enhance facilitation practices already under way. The guidebook will be distributed to FSDs, air carriers, and airport personnel and will cover such topics as (1) queue management techniques; (2) improved procedures for Second Pass screening (already incorporated into our current standard operating procedure), whereby passengers

who alarm the walk-through magnetometer will be given an opportunity to remove any items that may have caused the alarm (such as jewelry, keys, or coins), and walk through the magnetometer again, rather than go through more labor intensive and intrusive additional screening; (3) standardized procedures for divestiture, or the process of removing items from one's person that might cause an alarm; and (4) a standard script for delivering instructions at the screening checkpoint to facilitate effective, efficient, and speedy screening. In addition to distribution of hard and digital copies of the Aviation Partnership Support Plan guidebook to FSDs and stakeholders, the guidance will be available on TSA's website. The guidance will be easy to use and easy to update and amend as techniques are refined and improved, or as necessary to meet any unique challenges at particular U.S. airports.

Each month, TSA intercepts more than 500,000 prohibited items at airports around the country. Since the beginning of the current fiscal year alone, TSA has intercepted over 300 firearms, in addition to more than 1.5 million knives and incendiaries. While the majority of cases are not intentional violations, too frequently individuals are deliberately attempting to circumvent security or test the security system. We have intercepted a knife concealed inside a soda can, a sword hidden inside a cane, and a knife hidden within a prosthetic leg, just to name a few examples. Each month more than 40 firearms are intercepted at airport checkpoints by TSA screeners, which tells us first, that we must continue to be diligent in our screening efforts, and second, that passengers are not voluntarily complying with the ban on bringing dangerous weapons onto aircraft. TSA believes that educating the traveler about prohibited items is another important part of our summer strategy. Therefore, the second element integral to our implementation of our Aviation Partnership Support Plan will be deployment of an extensive and ongoing passenger education program to help prepare summer travelers to do their part in easing traffic through our Nation's airports.

We will launch the *Prepare for SUMMER Takeoff* campaign in late May, building upon our successful Prepare for Takeoff theme that was launched to support the federalization efforts in late 2002. The goal is to get passengers ready to go on their trip so that lines move quicker and passengers have a smoother experience. Passengers play an important role in supporting aviation security and we want to make sure that they are prepared for this role. The Campaign will educate passengers on the most common issues that are encountered at the checkpoints, including what can be packed in carry-on versus checked baggage, when to have their identification and boarding pass available, as well as issues that are germane specifically to the summer season. Our partners in the travel industry, including airlines, airports, travel agents, visitor and convention bureaus, and business traveler associations, to name a few, will all be critical in helping TSA to promote these important messages. Also, we will partner with the airports and online travel agencies to provide passengers with information on check-in and security wait times, parking situations, etc. to assist them with their trip and make it as hassle free as possible. In addition, TSA will conduct a robust summer travel public information promotion using TV, radio, and print outlets throughout the country to support the Campaign. Finally, we will continue to update our website that is specifically designed to provide travelers with all of this important information, to reflect any changes in security requirements and to

respond to passenger input. We want to effect changes in people's behavior so that they think about how they can prepare before they arrive at the airport.

Third, FSDs will hold meetings of TSA representatives, airport directors, air carrier station managers and others, to formulate and provide additional guidance, recommendations, and local training. At the focus airports, these meetings may include representatives from TSA headquarters.

Fourth, after these meetings are held, TSA headquarters representatives will review the plans developed in the course of the meetings and make sure that the best of those plans are shared with all FSDs.

I would like to outline some of the specific strategies that will be in place as part of the "best practices" guidance or will supplement that guidance. TSA will provide screeners enhanced training on the Second Pass screening process. Divestiture procedures will be improved by the addition of divestiture tables, deployment of divestiture "coaches" to assist passengers in the process, and the creation of a standardized script of divestiture instructions. We believe that utilization of effective divestiture strategies could increase throughput by as much as twenty percent. TSA employees, including field and headquarters staff will assist in non-screening positions at U.S. airports on critical travel days.

FSDs will be directed to ensure full screening capability, including use of overtime. This will require aggressive management of leave and vacation schedules, keeping checkpoints open longer on critical travel days, and use of selectee, airline preferred customer, and employee lanes to full capacity, limiting vendor/concessionaire screening to non-peak travel periods, and conducting routine, on-going screener training during non-peak travel periods. FSDs will also be expected to watch for stress in the screener workforce and take steps to ameliorate that stress, through breaks, rotation of duties, and continuous encouragement.

Our partners in the Aviation Partnership Support Plan process--airline, airport, and association stakeholders--will support TSA screening processes through line management in prescreening areas, ID-to-ticket verification, identification of travelers for selectee screening, baggage handling, checkpoint divestiture and bin retrieval, and prioritization of passengers and baggage to ensure that passengers whose flights are about to board are moved to the front of the line. Stakeholders will also assist by emphasizing airline carry-on policies and by posting helpful information on this as well as on divestiture procedures and prohibited items on airline websites, at self-service kiosks, and in in-flight magazines.

Parallel to our Aviation Partnership Support Plan, TSA will pilot several technological improvements to help increase checkpoint throughput. TSA acknowledges that the process of x-raying carry-on baggage is a constraint to rapid checkpoint throughput, and we are exploring various changes to checkpoint equipment, configurations, and processes that will minimize delays in passenger screening operations.

Other TSA initiatives that are being developed separately from our Aviation Partnership Support Plan will necessarily enhance and support the objectives of the plan. As part of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) (P.L. 107-71), Congress directed that the Secretary of Transportation ensure that “the Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening System, or any successor system is used to evaluate all passengers before they board an aircraft; and includes procedures to ensure that individuals selected by the system and their carry-on and checked baggage are adequately screened.” In addition, TSA continues its work on the Registered Traveler (RT) Program. TSA envisions that a fully implemented RT program would be purely voluntary and would offer qualified participants an expedited travel experience. Volunteer participants in the RT program will be requested to submit personal data, such as biometrics (fingerprint and iris scan), that will be used for identity verification. Participants in the program will still be required to submit to screening for weapons, explosives, and prohibited items at the checkpoint. TSA also plans to institute a Registered Traveler (RT) Pilot Program this summer at a limited number of airports. RT pilots will last approximately 90 days. TSA will use these pilots to test whether an RT program could provide both security and customer service benefits. A security assessment will be conducted on each RT applicant to determine eligibility for the program. Upon conclusion of the pilots, results will be analyzed to determine the feasibility of proceeding with a larger scale program.

TSA continues to install screening equipment, including in-line explosives detection systems (EDS). EDS and explosives trace detection (ETD) equipment purchase and installation is the key to compliance with statutory requirements for 100% screening of checked baggage by explosives detection systems. TSA purchases and installs this equipment through a variety of mechanisms, including Letters of Intent (LOIs), which provide a partial reimbursement to U.S. airport operators for facility modifications required to install in-line EDS solutions. TSA has issued eight airport LOIs, covering nine airports. TSA is also using resources to purchase and install EDS and ETD machines at U.S. airports outside the LOI process.

Finally, we continually review our prohibited items list to ensure that items that are no longer deemed to be a threat to security are removed, so that passengers may once again transport them as carry-on items. We hope to complete our most current review in sufficient time to remove additional items from the list as warranted before the start of the high-volume summer travel season.

I want to emphasize, once more, that we view our summer planning as more than a short-term solution to increased security and customer service challenges. Rather, we expect this exercise to serve us well as we continue to refine and implement the best practices that will become the hallmark of the extraordinary level of security we will demand of our screeners year-round. This endeavor also demonstrates the value of a strong partnership between TSA and our stakeholder organizations—a partnership that will continue to yield improvements in aviation security in the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you on this timely subject. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.